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ABSTRACT

The steps outlined in this paper are intended to help organize and capitalize on local school resources when constructing inservice programs for improving writing instruction. The guidelines are based on the assumptions that faculties are aware of their own teaching needs, that the best inservice comes from teachers who can effectively demonstrate their successful techniques, that writing should be integrated with all subject areas, and that both teachers and students must master the writing processes (prewriting, drafting, and revising). Emanating from these assumptions, the ten steps for inservice program development include the following: (1) enlisting administrative support, (2) soliciting teachers as presenters/participants, (3) compiling a writing bibliography to which program participants can refer, (4) collecting effective teaching ideas from participants and sequencing them according to topic areas within the writing process, (5) scheduling workshop sessions based on the sequential list from step 4, and (6) having participating teachers prepare and present their ideas within a "Do-Look-Learn" approach to inservice education. The "Do-Look-Learn" method is explained and resources are suggested concerning prewriting, drafting, revising, teaching mechanics, grading, small group work, the teacher's role, writing in the content areas, and sequencing writing. (RL)

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IMPROVING THE TEACHING OF WRITING IN YOUR OWN SCHOOL: A STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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Allan Spanjer and Carolyn Boiarsky

Are you frustrated with the lack of success your students are having in learning to write? Needing better methods for teaching writing? Searching for a staff development program to meet your needs?

Help is on the way.

Here is a blueprint for action, a way to organize and capitalize on the resources in your school to improve the teaching of writing. With only a limited outlay of funds and the cooperation of other faculty members you can organize a staff development program adapted from the Georgia State University/Southeast Center for the Teaching of Writing,[1] a satellite of the highly successful University of California, Berkeley/Bay Area Writing Project.[2] The program is based on the following assumptions:

1. Faculties are aware of their own teaching needs. They are capable of developing their own staff development programs for acquiring knowledge and skills to meet those needs without the help of outside specialists.

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School of Education
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2. The best teacher of teachers is another teacher who has had success in a similar situation. The practices of these successful teachers can be effectively demonstrated to others.
3. Teaching writing is the responsibility of teachers of all subjects, not just those of the language arts. Writing should be integrated with all subject areas.
4. Processes of prewriting, drafting, and revising are the basics which must be mastered. To understand fully the process of writing and to lead students effectively through these processes, teachers themselves must write.

Using these assumptions as a guide, teachers in your school can collaborate and develop their own inservice staff development program for improving the teaching of writing. Here is how to do it: for an overview, look at the program map and then follow the step-by-step procedure.

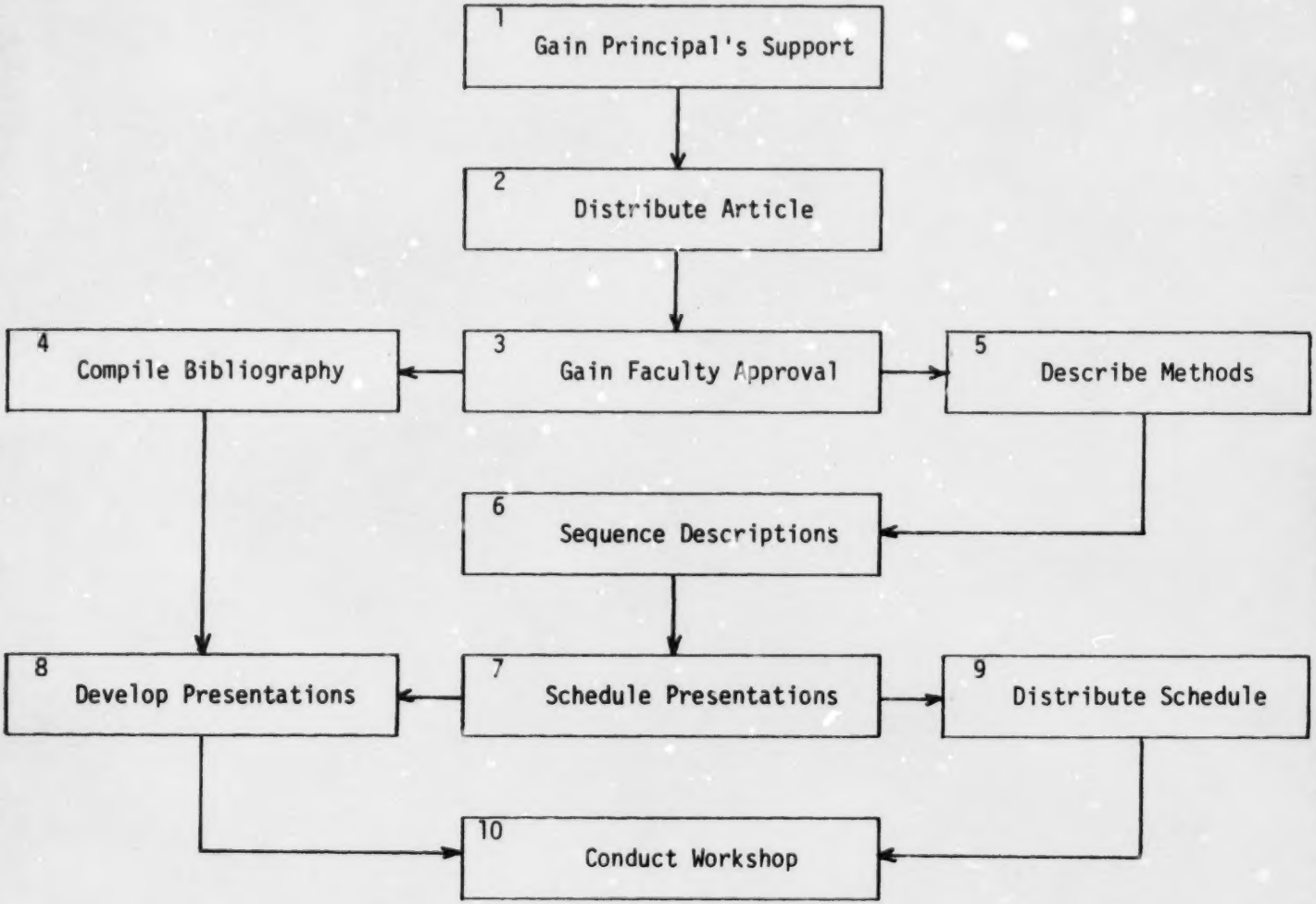
STEP 1. Share this article with your principal and enlist his/her support. Plan a time when the contents of this article can be discussed at a faculty meeting.

STEP 2. Duplicate and distribute copies of this article to all other faculty members. Attach a note indicating the subject of this article will be placed on the agenda for the [next] faculty meeting.

STEP 3. Determine at the faculty meeting those teachers who desire to participate in a development program to improve their knowledge and skills in teaching writing. All teachers in the school need not participate, but the more the merrier.

STEP 4. Ask your media specialist to compile a bibliography and to order some relevant books and journals which faculty can use to augment

PROGRAM MAP


1
Gain Principal's Support
2
Distribute Article
4
Compile Bibliography
3
Gain Faculty Approval
5
Describe Methods
6
Sequence Descriptions
8
Develop Presentations
7
Schedule Presentations
9
Distribute Schedule
10
Conduct Workshop

their knowledge of writing and the teaching of writing. See the bibliography for suggestions.

STEP 5. Ask each participating teacher to identify a method which he/she has found to be effective in teaching writing and which he/she would like to share with others. Each member writes a brief description of the method. The description might look something like this:

> METHOD DESCRIPTION
>
> Writing from Experiences
>
> Children entering school have had many experiences. They have learned from their experiences and have many ideas based upon them. This presentation allows the student to discuss and write about the experiences they have had and the ideas they have formed.
>
> Judy Houck

STEP 6. Collect these descriptions and sequence them according to the headings under which they fall in the bibliography--the writing process, prewriting, drafting, revising, teaching the mechanics, small group work, the teacher's role, writing in the content areas, and sequencing writing. If no one has described a method related to one or more of these headings, then consider bringing in a guest speaker to make the desired presentation. Potential sources are high school teachers, central office staff, state department of education personnel, professional writers, National Writing Project consultants, or local college faculty members.

STEP 7. Based on the sequencing of these descriptions, determine a schedule for the school year indicating the dates when each of these presentations will be made. Schedule the workshop sessions about two weeks

apart and allow about two hours for each presentation. The schedule might look something like this:

PRESENTER	PRESENTATION	DATE/TIME
	The Writing Process	
Ella Rivers	The Writing Process: Prewriting, Drafting, and Revising	September 30 3:00-5:00 p.m.
	Prewriting	
Joyce McKennie	Creating at Atmosphere for Writing	October 15 3:00-5:00 p.m.
Judy Houck	Writing from Experience	October 30 3:00-5:00 p.m.
	Drafting	
Mary Mount	Journal Writing	November 15 3:00-5:00 p.m.
Donna Gladding	Language Experience with a Zip	December 5 3:00-5:00 p.m.
Etc.		

STEP 8. Distribute the schedule to all faculty members, even the ones who have elected not to make presentations or to participate. They may change their minds and want to attend the workshop sessions.

STEP 9. Each teacher develops a presentation to demonstrate the method he/she has found to be effective in teaching writing (as reported in Step 5). The presentation is structured around a learning approach which involves the participating teachers in a doing activity. This approach has three characteristics: DO-LOOK-LEARN.

DO - involve the teachers in the writing method being demonstrated in much the same way they will be expected to involve their students back in the classroom. That way, the teachers will be better able to experience and identify with the feelings and thoughts of the students when they do this same activity.

LOOK - prepare handouts based on relevant research or authoritative opinion which support the effectiveness of the writing method being demonstrated. Use the bibliography as a source of information. Ask the teachers to analyze the writing and/or learning activity in which they have just engaged in relation to the assumptions and knowledge explained in the handouts.

LEARN - have teachers identify and share the knowledge and skills they have learned and prepare a lesson by adapting the method that was presented to their own teaching situation.

The teacher's presentation might look like the following example, "Writing from Experiences."

WRITING FROM EXPERIENCES

Judy Houck
Gwinnett County Schools

Introduction (5 minutes)

1. Purpose

   a. Teachers will learn how to use an object to stimulate children's creativity.
   b. Teachers will learn how to help students conduct an interview.
   c. Teachers will learn how to help students write a narrative in the expressive mode.
   d. Teachers will learn how to integrate oral and written narration.

2. Explanation of Learning Activity

   Teachers will use an object which symbolizes an experience they have had to stimulate their writing about that experience.

3. Setting the Stage for Learning Activity

   a. Method used with 7th grade students. Heterogeneous class, ranging from EMH to gifted students.
   b. Teachers will engage in the activity as themselves, rather than assume a student's role.

DO Learning Activity (30-40 minutes)

1. Prior to the presentation, the teachers will be asked to bring an object to class that symbolizes an experience.

2. The presenter shows the class the object he/she has brought and the teachers attempt to learn what experience the object symbolizes by interviewing the presenter. When they have determined the experience, the presenter relates the full story of the experience.

3. The class is divided into groups of 2 or 3. Teachers take turns showing the object which they have brought and allowing the rest of the group to identify the experience it symbolizes. When the experience is determined, the teacher whose object it is relates the entire experience. Each teacher is given 10 minutes to have his/her experience revealed.

4. Each teacher writes a narration about his/her experience.

5. Teachers exchange papers among their group members. This is an excellent time to discuss possible ways to revise the narration.

LOOK at Learning Activity (15-25 minutes)

1. According to Walter T. Petty's Experiences in Language, "children will write about those things they know about, things they have experienced, things that have meaning to them." Children coming to school have had many experiences. They have learned from those experiences as the basis for writing narration and have many ideas based upon them. In this activity, children use these experiences and ideas as a basis for writing.

2. Begin by providing many opportunities for discussion about the things they (children) know and the ideas they have formed. These discussions will help clarify ideas, build related concepts, and learn new vocabulary (Petty). In this activity students not only express ideas and describe their own experience, but through listening to each other learn new concepts and vocabulary.

3. According to Moffett and Wagner's Student-Centered Language Arts and Reading, K-13, "As students conduct interviews, they learn that open-ended questions will elicit better responses as they interview the teacher and then each other about the object they have brought."

LEARN from Learning Activity (20-30 minutes)

1. Teachers individually design a lesson adapting this method to their own classrooms.

2. Teachers form small groups, according to grade level, to discuss their plans for adaptation.

3. Teachers fill out evaluation form requesting feedback on (a) presentation and (b) additional ideas to explore in the presentation.

   a. Could these ideas be adapted for you?
   b. Suggestions for improving presentation?
   c. Were objectives clear? If not, why not?

STEP 10. Conduct the various workshop sessions according to the schedule. Except for the first session, each session includes two separate activities:

1. a 90-minute DO-LOOK-LEARN presentation of a method for teaching writing; and

2. a 30-minute discussion on teachers' experience in applying the method presented in a previous session in their own classrooms. It is intended that after a writing method has been presented in the workshop, participants will return to their respective classrooms to try out the method with their own students. They should be pre-prepared to discuss the results of this experience at each workshop session. The presenter for the day is responsible for leading the 30-minute discussion. The participants might focus on the following questions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What adaptations of the method did you make before trying it out in your own classroom?
2. What effect did this method have on the students' writing performance?
3. What influence did this method have on the students' attitude about writing?
4. What modifications would you make in the method before using it again?
5. What new ideas about teaching writing did you get from using this method?

By following this procedure your school faculty can easily implement an inservice staff development program for improving the teaching of writing as a means to helping your students improve their writing performance. Your own expertise and initiative are the needed ingredients. Then watch your students get turned on to writing!

POSTSCRIPT

The Bay Area Writing Project contends that if writing teachers are to help their students write effectively, they must understand the feelings and processes experienced by students as they write. Diagnosing student problems, recognizing paths to clear expression, knowing how to give appropriate feedback--all these skills are enhanced by teachers' regular involvement in their own writing. Teachers who write and share their writing with students reinforce students' interest in writing and demonstrate a willingness to improve their skills.

As a part of this staff development program you are encouraged to practice your own writing and to organize teacher response groups for critiquing and revising your pieces (see the Bibliography for articles on small group work). As a starting point, rework your method presentation so that it can be submitted as an article for publication in a professional journal. The audience and mode are defined for you by the journal. The profession will be richer for your contribution and you will be an even better writer and teacher of writing.

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